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Abstract: The Populist Chameleon: some general considerations on Lega Nord ideology

The paper reveals a chameleon-like characteristic, which means that individual political problems and elements of the party's rhetoric never disappear completely, but rather stay latent, ready to revive at any moment. The only fixed element is populism. After the four main phases of the Lega Nord policy, the party and its secretary Matteo Salvini enter a new era of politics that resembles the anti-particracy of the early years of activity, the only difference being that the party is uniting with its former enemies on the common ground, such as opposition to immigration, the European Union, and the euro currency. The party is paving the way to conquest some non-typical areas, such as the red regions, although there are no barriers to its further development.

Keywords: Lega Nord, Bossi, Salvini, populism, white belt, red belt, regionalism, nationalism, immigration, ethnocentrism

Introduction

The ideology and strategy of the Lega Nord (LN) depends on the political situation and the moods of the people.¹ The disproportionately large

¹ The word "chameleon" was used for the first time by Giovanna Pajetta, who, in the course of research into the Lega Nord, noticed its political opportunism (the party is trying

numbers of academic works² concerning this party may be explained by the fact that the party tackles most of the key political problems that the Italian State is trying to address: decentralisation, federalism, and autonomy. According to Conti, Roux and Tronconi, the Italian political system has many levels, which raises the problem of delegation of powers beyond the national level and at the local level, and each political party, regardless of its objectives and strategy, must take a stance with regard to this dilemma.³ On the other hand, with 11 political parties (2004–2010), only 37.6% of respondents (parties' delegates) believed that a federal reform was important for Italy (no other topic was ranked lower in terms of importance; in comparison, „health,” unemployment, schools, and environmental pollution gained more than 90%).⁴ Due to the party's growing support, numerous theories have been developed to explain the phenomenon of its success: populist parties are numerous in Italy, but only two of these have successfully covered (and closed to other parties) this political space in the so-

to adapt itself to the people's needs at all costs) which leads to numerous ideological changes. G. PAJETTA: *Il grande camaleonte. Episodi, passioni, avventure del leghismo*. Milan 1994.

² Apart from works that analyse more than one party (such as Daniele Albertazzi, John Art, Stefano Fella, Piero Ignazi, Cas Mudde, Duncan McDonnell, James Newell, Carlo Ruzza, Marco Tarchi), numerous bibliographies written by politicians themselves or by their ghost writers, the Lega Nord was of particular interest to: John Agnew, Giovanni Barbieri, Roberto Biorcio, Hans-George Betz, Anna Cento Bull, Margarita Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, Clotilde Champeyrache, Anna Cento Bull, Lynda Dematteo, Ilvo Diamanti, Mark Gilbert, Benito Giordano, Michel Huyseune, Renato Mannheimer, Michael Shin, Oliver Schmidtke, Damian Tambini, John Torpey, Dwayne Woods, Andrej Zaslove. Among exhaustive journalist and journalistic works, the work by Paolo Stefanini, *Avanti Po*, with its analysis of the development of support in the red regions, is useful in academic terms. Lynda Dematteo's *L'idiota in politica* raises some controversy due to the parts that contain simplifications that match the tone of a satirical essay, such as calling the party's leader an idiot acting without thinking first. Her thesis may be defended by saying that it would be difficult to see rationality in the vote for the leader, as Amoretti, Musella and Calise recall. Cf. F. AMORETTI, F. MUSELLA: *Il voto a Napoli. Una nuova stagione (anti)politica?*. p. 4, available at: <http://www.sisp.it/files/papers/2011/francesco-amoretti-e-fortunato-musella-1125.pdf> (accessed: 24.03.2016); M. CALISE: *La personalizzazione del voto*. p. 18, available at: http://www.mi.camcom.it/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=18b75372-61b0-4a40-acf5-9c0dcbeb9a5a (accessed: 11.04.2016). The theory in *Missionary politics* by José Pedro Zúquete also points to the element of irrationality that controls the electorate of today. Cf. J.P. ZÚQUETE: *Missionary Politics in Contemporary Europe*. New York 2007.

³ Italy has always been considered a specific system, with original asymmetric decentralisation, and with special-status regions (Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige, Aosta Valley, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia) enjoying more power and fiscal autonomy than the others. N. CONTI, C. ROUX, F. TRONCONI: "Introduction: Parties and voters in a multi-level electoral setting." *Modern Italy* 2009, Vol. 14, No 2.

⁴ The Lega Nord and the Popolo della Libertà (PdL) parties did not participate in the survey. P. BORDANDINI: *La spada di Vendola. Una risorsa o un problema per il centrosinistra?* Rome 2013, p. 100.

called Second Republic.⁵ Currently, the group of successful populist parties also includes the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S).⁶ What is more, although theoretically the populists should have stayed in power for a short time,⁷ this populist party's rule has been extremely long, and its ministers have held key positions (the 1st Berlusconi government: 1994—1995⁸; the 2nd and 3rd Berlusconi government: 2001—2006; the 4th Berlusconi government: 2008—2011). The party deals with a range of complex topics, and its support is based on original cleavages as compared with those of other parties. While the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) was based mainly on the class division and supported by the Soviet Union, the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) was based on religion and supported by the United States, which had an impact on the entire political system. Poor at first (its main forms of combat were street graffiti and speeches originally given in almost empty rooms), and independent of international politics and external aid, the LN relied upon dichotomy: North/South, centre/periphery, traditional party/civil society, and interpreted the history in its own way in order to use it to gain the greatest support possible.⁹ Unfortunately, there is no room for the presentation of Italy's rich history, or for the explanation of the communist or Catholic subcultures or the meaning of individual territorial divisions that reflect the specific culture, economy, society and politics (with the assumption that over the first period of the Second Republic, the LN was „territorial,” and the electorate and its actual needs were different for each region — such analyses are important). The latter — according to different schools — may not exist at all (a school denying the existence of essential differences between the North and the South), may exist at the level of two (a school acknowledging the North/South dualism, where the latter is associated with deepening backwardness), three (mainly the work of Arnaldo Bagnasco, assuming the existence of three fairly independent and unique macroeconomic areas), or four territorial zones (decades of research by Istituto Cattaneo into the voter-party relations, conducted, among others, by Giorgio Galli; in this context, works such as those by Parisi and Pas-

⁵ Cf. M. TARCHI: *L'Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo a Beppe Grillo*. Bologna 2015.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ P. TAGGART: *Concepts in the Social Science Populism*. Buckingham—Philadelphia 2004, p. 1.

⁸ The short 1st period of rule of the Berlusconi government is an exception; this was the consequence of e.g., among others, the Lega Nord's withdrawal from the coalition, resulting in the lack of majority in the parliament. Italy does not practice the vote of no confidence, although this procedure has been used by different parties — governments fall for different reasons. DI CIOLO, L. CIAURRO. *Il diritto parlamentare nella teoria e nella pratica*. Milan 2013, p. 794.

⁹ I. DIAMANTI: "The Northern League." In: *The New Italian Republic*. Eds. S. GUNDLE, S. PARKER. London—New York 1996, p. 115.

quino are of considerable significance).¹⁰ In this context, the crucial work that legitimises the Lega Nord ideology is *Making Democracy Work* by Robert Putnam, who emphasises the uniqueness of the North, for this purpose referring to the medieval period.¹¹ It must be remembered that, when it comes to its origins,¹² the party developed in the North, mainly in the

¹⁰ In addition to this division into the productive North and the structurally backward South, particularly interesting is the identification of small companies in the centre and in the north-east, with their great ideological importance.

¹¹ The work was created as a result of the LN success. Its significant aspect is the presentation of the contrast between the productive North and the 'amoral familism' of the South. R.D. PUTNAM: *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton 1994. This term is associated with the results of research done by Banfield who, in his work of 1958, analysed the success of the mafia in Sicily, and discovered that an organisation of that type could prosper as individuals took care of their private and family material interests, instead of the common good and the welfare of the country. The lack of political associations and corporate organisation in Sicily is also a very important limiting factor in terms of economic development. Giovanni Orsina (2013) states that in its populism, the Forza Italia appeals to people perceived in the light of *amoral familism*, from which the LN clearly dis-sents. Cf. E. C. BANFIELD: *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. Glencoe 1958; G. ORSINA: "Introduction." In: IDEM: *Il berlusconismo nella storia d'Italia*. Venice 2013.

¹² To elaborate on the division by Anna Cento Bull (2003: Introduction), i.e. items 2 and 3 below, and by Lucia Bonfreschi (2008: ch. 8.1), item 1, the following theories explaining the origins and causes of success may be distinguished: 1) a theory focused on the „broad voice of protest” against old parties and the political system, according to Lucia Bonfreschi (2008: ch. 8.1), in this approach the party is seen as responsive to political transformations, and an alternative filling the void after the collapse of the old party system; this approach was gradually abandoned; 2) focusing on ethnicity, a group of people fighting for common rights and privileges, even before forming an electorate, bitter about the State politics and seeking to change the status quo; 3) constructivist, analysing the LN party as a national movement representing the new „Padania” nation, or a regionalist and populist party that has conceived the northern Italian ethnicity; 4) analysing the relations between a subculture, a political party, and an electorate; contrary to the former approach, this explains the real reasons for the existence of Padania (such as Anna Cento Bull); 5) focused on historical, sometimes very distant elements, such as the Middle Ages or the Risorgimento period and on the *sui generis* symbolism (for example Clotilde Champeyrache, Carmen Lettieri); 6) an original and isolated approach focusing on sacralisation of politics (José Pedro Zúquete): the people have been chosen by God, and the nation they form is sacred. In this way, a completely pagan party uses religious elements to maximise the support and strengthen its structure; and these elements — as in the case of religion — cannot be explained rationally. This division is a certain necessary simplification to be used as a compass. Cf. L. BONFRESCHI: "Il fenomenoleghista e la Lega Nord." In: *Storia delle destre nell'Italia repubblicana*. Ed. G. ORSINA. Soveria Mannelli



Figure 1. Official party symbol

Source: <http://leganord.org/il-movimento/simboli> (accessed: 10 April 2016).

north-eastern region with the Catholic subculture,¹³ where the Democrazia Cristiana had ruled in the past. Anna Cento Bull was one of the primary researchers to theorise the relationship between the existence of individual isolated subcultures and the quick rise in the support for the LN, when they lost their reference party. The earlier history is also of great significance, as the party is using anti-Southern rhetoric, glorifying independent city-states under the Pope's protection in the medieval times, attacking the heroes of unification of the Italian State, referring to the heroes, anthem, and history of its own choice, and creating own symbols and rituals.¹⁴ According to Newth, if attention is paid to the analysis of the history of Italy and to the regional fragmentation and division, it is possible to see the way in which the party manipulates and interprets the history in order to achieve its own political goals. However, it is equally important to find the actual people's need for a party that would meet their political goals,¹⁵ and this is the aspect that I intend to focus on.

Uniqueness in comparison with similar parties

In order to understand the specific nature of the Lega Nord, it is interesting to consider which of the parties fighting for autonomy exist at the level of its fantastic and colourful ideology. Clotilde Champeyrache identifies three types of groups theorised by the party: 1) both separatist groups and those fighting to maintain the autonomous status; 2) groups with the so-called "antique traditions," most isolated in comparison with other political groups; 3) the third group includes parties that are most fierce in their

2008, ch. 8.1; A.C. BULL: "Collective identities: from the politics of inclusion to the politics of ethnicity and difference." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 2003, Vol. 2 (3—4), pp. 41—42; C. CHAMPEYRACHE: *La Ligue du Nord : le retour ambigu de l'identité territoriale sur la scène politique italienne*, [available from <http://espacepolitique.revues.org/2046> (accessed: 2.05.2015)]; IDEM: *La Ligue du Nord, Un séparatisme à l'italienne*. Paris 2002; C. LETTIERI: "«Bruciare il tricolore». Lega Nord e stigmatizzazione del Risorgimento." *Italies* 2011, No 15, [available from: <http://italies.revues.org/3200> (accessed: 7.08.2015)]; J.P. ZÚQUETE: *Missionary Politics in Contemporary Europe*. New York 2007.

¹³ See white belt, figure 2.

¹⁴ See further C. LETTIERI: "«Bruciare il tricolore»..."

¹⁵ G.H. NEWTH: *A Brief Comparative History of Economic Regionalism in the North Italian Macro-region and Catalonia*. Siena 2014, pp. 2—3, [available at: <http://www.rivistaprogressus.it/wp-content/uploads/george-newth-brief-comparative-history-of-economic-regionalism-in-the-north-italian-macro-region-and-catalonia.pdf> (accessed: 9.05.2015)].

political fight, and the largest.¹⁶ The Lega Nord, comprising also other formations, originates from this third confrontational group or, in other words, from the group of „fighting” Leagues from the North. The party’s symbol is a raised sword (see figure 1 below), and its leader Umberto Bossi, *si parva licet*, ‘replaced’ the figure of Alberto da Giussano.¹⁷ On the other hand, William Brierley and Luca Giacometti divide the parties with autonomic aspirations into new and old. The factor that unifies the old parties (e.g. Partito Sardo d’Azione, Union Valdôtaine, Südtiroler Volkspartei) is nostalgia for the past (return to the roots, territory, language and tradition).¹⁸ *Mutatis mutandis*, these are usually isolated parties whose representatives in the parliament handle only region-related matters and are especially active only in meetings at the regional, provincial, and local level. The Italian government has responded to claims of those parties, using methods typical of Western democracies (protection of the language, recognition of civil rights, decentralisation of administration), at the same time suppressing any anti-system inclinations, including separatism.¹⁹ The Lega Nord has two clear characteristics: the first one is associated with the organisation and considered of utmost importance (Bossi used to say: “organisation first, votes secondo”), where iron discipline, pyramidal organisation, and diverse stages of membership (Bossi was afraid of an excessive and uncontrolled growth of party members) demanding absolute loyalty to the party were to protect the ethno-federalist project from internal infiltration; and the second one — external, reflected in addressing the people directly, and in the post-democratic representation (where political parties are of secondary importance).²⁰ According to researchers, it is possible to observe positive elements, such as the people, the territory, and the sub-national culture: the common identity is neither ideological nor class-based, but territorial. Negative: it requires the development of a theory of an enemy, recognisable first in the “central State,” and

¹⁶ The first group comprises the following political powers: *Partito Sardo d’Azione*, *Union Valdôtaine*, *Friulanisti*, *Süd Tirol list*, *Movimento autonomista occitano*, *Unione del Popolo Veneto*, the Slovenes from north-eastern Italy; the second group comprises: *Südtiroler Volkspartei* and a small group: *Melone* autonomists; the third group comprises: *Liga Veneta*, *Lega Lombarda*, *Serenissima Liga Veneta*, *Piemont Autonomista*, *Unión Ligure*, *Alleanza Toscana*. C. CHAMPEYRACHE: *La Ligue du Nord. Un separatism*. Paris 2002, pp. 43—45.

¹⁷ This half-mythical medieval character remains obscure even today. According to the Milan chronicles, he supposedly organised a protest of communes protecting the Pope’s interests, leading the legendary Company of Death fighting the invader Federico Barbarossa. C. LETTIERI: “»Bruciare il tricolore«...”

¹⁸ W. BRIERLEY, L. GIACOMETTI: “Italian National Identity and the Failure of Regionalism.” In: *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. Eds. B. JENKINS, S.A. SOFOS. London—New York 1996, p. 169.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 171.

later in the “political party system associated with the partocracy phenomenon,” and then in the “welfare state,” the “parasitic South,” and further — in immigration, crime and drugs, social and marginal groups, or ones different from the native community.²¹ These elements are representative of the right wing, where the inequality principle is a rule, and where equality is an exception, according to Norberto Bobbio’s theory.²² One of the Lega Nord’s most aggressive posters (2006 political campaign) featured the following slogan: “Hands off families. No to homosexual marriages.”²³ To avoid fractionalisation with which other leagues (including Liga Veneta) had struggled earlier, the party introduced two principles: 1) new members could not vote for managing authorities, 2) after a long and proven activity, it was possible to gain the status of a full member with the voting right.²⁴ What constitutes an element connecting the lower levels within the party hierarchy, including the so-called volunteers, is a strong emphasis on symbolism and folklore (indocinated volunteers willingly stood in the mud and the rain by the River Po, sang songs and hymns, and articulated ceremonies around the Padanian Declaration of Independence). According to Maroni, such meetings are organised in order to motivate lower-level members, as only the higher management is being paid by the party.²⁵ In terms of organisation, inspired by Lenin, who was able to motivate the members appropriately, contrary to, e.g. the Partito Comunista Italiano, the party is post-ideological; it is not organised along the horizontal right wing-left wing axis but along the vertical North-South axis, and its territorial character is the party’s strength.²⁶ Lynda De Matteo, analysing the Lega Nord party from the anthropological perspective, claims that the Lenin model within the LN party reflects a degree of democracy, where members — if they do not agree with the party leader — are dismissed *ad libitum*; also, the politics penetrates every realm of everyday life. From painting green stripes in cities controlled by its politicians, through the privati-

²¹ Ibidem, p. 172.

²² N. BOBBIO: *Destra e Sinistra. Ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica*. Rome 2004, pp. 44—45.

²³ G. LOSITO *et al.*: “Contenuti e strategie di comunicazione nei manifesti della campagna elettorale per le elezioni politiche del 2006.” In: *La politica mediatizzata: forme della comunicazione politica nel confronto*. Ed. G. SENSALÈS, M. BONAIUTO. Milan 2008, p. 130.

²⁴ L. BONFRESCHI: “Il fenomenoleghista e la Lega ...”. See chapter 8.3.

²⁵ M. BELLIZI: *Maroni: “La Lega? un partito LENINISTA, post-ideologico ma con una forte ideologia.”* website post Mauro Parolini. *Assessore allo Sviluppo Economico di Regione Lombardia*. 2010 [<http://www.mauroparolini.it/italian/leggi-news/309/function.simplexml-loadstring#sthash.aqwqNSKg.dpuf>; <http://www.mauroparolini.it/italian/leggi-news/309/function.simplexml-load-string> (accessed: 10.04.2016)].

²⁶ “Maroni: »La Lega è ispirata a Lenin, ma è post-ideologica«”. *Blitz Quotidiano* 23.06.2010 [<http://www.blitzquotidiano.it/politica-italiana/lega-maroni-ispirata-lenin-ma-post-ideologica439737/#sthash.6BF0WW6y.dpuf> (accessed: 7.04.2016)].

sation of schools (in this way, a school in the Ardo commune has become “Padania”) to the use of the Christian religion — in an operation cynically called White Christmas (2009) — to better control immigrants from outside the European Union, allowing the authorities to visit their homes — anyone without regular papers lost the right of residence.²⁷ The consequences of the events described above are lighter for the immigrants than the government cooperation between the Lega Nord, the Forza Italia, and the Alleanza Nazionale, which brought one of the harshest anti-immigration laws in Europe during the 2nd and the 4th period of the Berlusconi Government.²⁸

Ideology and support

In hindsight, for strategic reasons, the decision to join the centre-right coalition was forced, despite the open rhetoric of hate addressed to its supporters.²⁹ Ideologically, the Lega Nord became closer to the Forza Italia due to its economic neoliberalism and the attack on old parties and the opposition.³⁰ This attitude resulted from the fact that after the Tangentopoli affair many leaders wanted to be ambassadors of change.³¹ In comparison with other par-

²⁷ L. DEMATTEO: *L' idiota in politica: antropologia della Lega Nord*. Milan 2011, pp. 62, 130.

²⁸ Cf. E. BENELLI: “Migration discourses in Italy.” In: *Immigration et “vivre-ensemble”: politiques et discours*. 2013, No. 13, [available online: <http://cm.revues.org/1419> (accessed: 15.02.2016)].

²⁹ This is an out-out choice: the party would either have formed a part of the government, implementing its own politics, or it would have stayed in isolation and opposition — due to its rhetoric, it could only count on a limited territorial support in the sub-Alpine North. The party, risking the loss of its identity, had to turn a blind eye on ideological differences with the coalition members, and count on partial implementation of its political plans; the media empire of the coalition leader was also an important bargaining card. In this way, a well-calibrated coalition was formed, thanks to which the territorial weaknesses of the Forza Italia were completed with the votes of other allies whose votes were more territorial (for example, the AB supported the votes of the centre-right in the centre and in the South). At the same time, the left, as in the First Republic, was concentrated mainly in the so-called red belt zone.

³⁰ One of the electoral slogans of the Lega Nord in 1994 was: „today, there is a great confusion, the old parties, like cheats, are changing their name, presenting themselves as new, liberal and pro-federalist, but these are lies. Do not make a mistake: vote for the Lega.” I. PEZZINI: *Lo spot elettorale*. Rome 2001, p. 68.

³¹ V. BUFACCHI, S. BURGESS: *Italy since 1989. Events and Interpretations*. London 1997, p. 172. Although there were leaders and parties opposing the changes (et pour cause), they were punished with poor electoral results.

ties that participated in the first elections within the new electoral system in 1994, the Lega Nord seemed to be of antique origins.³² Already in the 1980s, the party started to gradually capture the votes of the parties belonging to the old political system; however, it gained the most, thanks to the collapse of the DC and the isolation and fractionalisation of the centre. In its early period of development, the LN spread in urban areas.³³ Despite the first insignificant results of the Lega Lombarda (LL) in Lombardy (0.5%) in 1987, an explosion of support took place in 1992 (8.7%). The party's advance was stopped on the Emilia-Romagna/Tuscany line, still with a prevailing presence of the former Partito Comunista Italiano. As Caciagli states, "[...] white was replaced by green, [...] and red still exists [...]"³⁴ Its rapid development is considered to be one of the reasons for the establishment of the Forza Italia party and Silvio Berlusconi's involvement in politics, as — due to the weak moderate centre — he wanted to avoid a parliament comprised of the divided and radical right (Movimento Sociale Italiano/Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord) and the dominant left.³⁵ The main objective of the Lega Nord in 1994 had already been reached; the party replaced the DC in its strongholds (see figure 2, above), and in the parliament — thanks to the mixed electoral system — it was the broadest political power (despite its 5th place, in proportion gaining 8.4%). When comparing the works of authors dealing with the economic aspects of the ideology promoted (e.g. Hans George Betz, Lucia Bonfreschi, Raffaele De Mucci) in the electoral campaign of the centre-right in 1994, it is not difficult to notice elements shared by the Forza Italia and the Lega Nord, such as: 1) privatisation of most public companies; 2) simplification of the tax system, with a reduction of tax rates for entities and companies (and therefore, protection of small and medium-sized enter-

³² D. BALDASSARI: "Il voto ideologico esiste? L'utilizzo delle categorie di sinistra e destra nell' elettorato italiano." *Quaderni dell' Osservatorio Elettorale* 2003, No 49, p. 11 [available at: <http://www.regione.toscana.it/-/quaderno-n-49> (accessed: 1.04.2016)].

³³ In the 1992 elections, the Lega won 11 cities, and in 1993 — as many as 19. G. DI FRANCO, R. GRITTI: "La "Rivoluzione" nelle urne. Un' analisi dei risultati delle elezioni amministrative del 6 e del 20 giugno 1993." *Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale* 1993, No. 42, p. 131.

³⁴ M. CACIAGLI: *Subculture politiche territoriali o geografia elettorale?*, p. 95 [available at: <http://www.fupress.net/index.php/smp/article/viewFile/10320/9505> (accessed: 2.02.2015)].

White — from the white region, characteristic of the DC; green — from the colour and symbolism of the Lega Nord. White is clearly a symbol of the Catholic culture (the so-called white belt), where the DC won its supporters; green is a symbol of the Lega Lombarda/Lega Nord party, whereas red symbolises the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the Communist subculture (located in the so-called red belt), and later the Partito Democratico Della Sinistra (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista (RC).

³⁵ Cf. C. GOLIA: *Dentro Forza Italia. Organizzazione e militanza*. Venice 1997, p. 34; A. MARINO: *Forza Italia. Nascita, Evoluzione e Sviluppo del Centro Destra Italiano (1993—2001)* (Doctoral dissertation). Salerno 2012, p. 117.

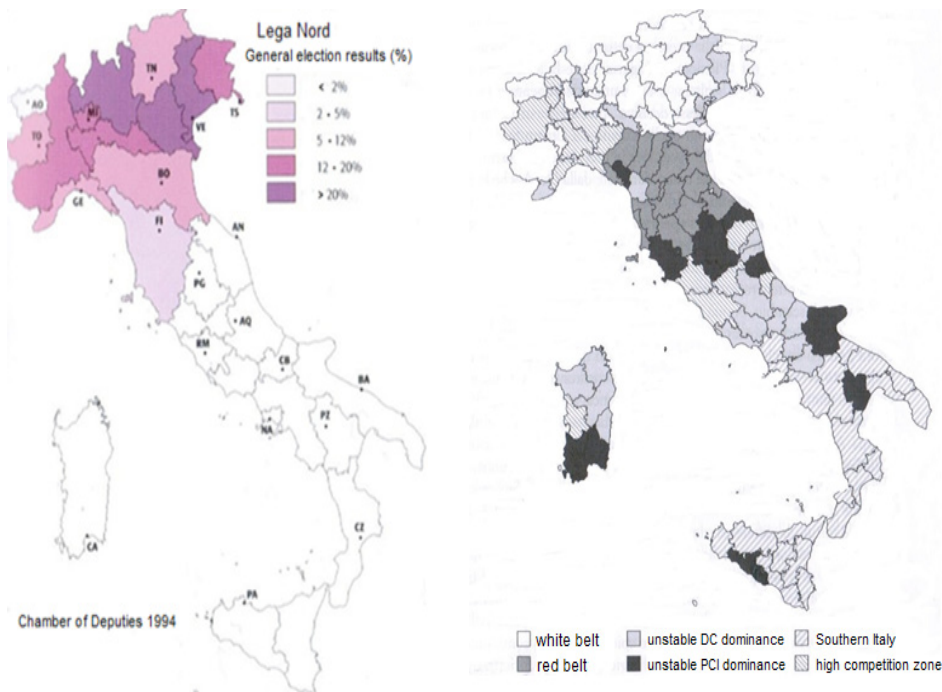


Fig. 2. Percentage of the LN votes in the parliamentary elections (1994) concentration of the votes in individual subculture areas (1948–1990).

Source: Figure on the right (translated extract): M. COTTA, L. VERZICHELLI: *Il sistema politico italiano*. Bologna 2011, p. 117. Figure on the left (translated extract): P. CORBETTA, M.S. PIRETTI: *Atlante storico elettorale d'Italia*. Bologna 2013, p. 181.

prises); 3) a change of the pension scheme; 4) a reform of the law and bureaucracy to limit their presence in the citizens' lives, and to reduce wastefulness resulting from the previous inefficiency (which, at last, could free the productive powers of the North); 5) fight with participacy; 6) State fiscal support for investors, and a more flexible labour market.³⁶ "Less tax for everyone" (Italian: *Meno tasse per tutti*), was an invariable campaign motto of Silvio Berlusconi. A tax relief for the productive North, whose resources are being "sucked out" by the South, is also a key point for the LN party. The early LN policy is pro-European and promotes integration with other wealthy countries: the region is not only blocked by Rome and the South from its further integration with the EU, but also "pushed towards Third World

³⁶ Items 1–4: H.G. BETZ: "Against Rome: The Lega Nord." In: *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*. Eds. H.G. BETZ, S. IMMERFALL. London 1998, p. 48; Items 4 and 5: R. DE MUCCI: *Democrazia dissociativa*. Soveria Mannelli 2013, p. 69; Items 4–6: L. BONFRESCHI: "Il fenomeno leghista e la Lega Nord...", ch. 8.3.

countries.”³⁷ Carlo Ruzza and Oliver Schmidtke saw different phases of the anti-immigration politics, where the party gradually dulled its anti-Southern attitude characteristic of the early period.³⁸ First, the rhetoric was against the South, next it focused on immigrants (mid-1980s), and then on the battle with the State and the political parties (the so-called third phase of the 1990s). The alternation between the anti-immigration and anti-Southern rhetoric was also observed by Betz; according to this researcher, these two elements have co-existed since 1995.³⁹ During the term of the first Berlusconi government, the party experienced numerous internal clashes, and became divided into three factions; the LN lost 1/3 of its members,⁴⁰ and the electorate could have been captured by the Forza Italia (the FI is most strongly supported in Sicily and in Lombardy, the Lega Nord region) with similar opinions on economic issues. Therefore, one of the reactions to these problems was radicalisation of the views, and withdrawal from the coalition.⁴¹ The party clearly expresses its intention to have the northern region, Padania, separated from the rest of the country. Although the name stems from Latin, Bossi avoided any associations with Rome; he preferred to go back to the historical roots of the Indo-European peoples, with certain unique characteristics, such as aspirations to freedom and ties to the local community. Woods says that the LN has never defined the identity of its region; at first, it was said that its origins were German, later — Celtic. Next, a picture combining the local elements of Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto was accepted.⁴² Although the party, standing on its own in the elections of 1996, won its record support (10.1%), its basic plan failed. It did not become the main alternative for the right-wing electorate, and was unable to stop the left-wing government; in other words, it did not become the third alternative political power (or the ‘third pole’) in Italy. The anti-party sentiments of the turn of the 1990s, driving the choice of the *homo iratus et infelix*, gradually faded away. The party no longer had the free backup of Berlusconi’s television, and with its separatist views it could not count on mass support. Thus, it

³⁷ H.G. BETZ: “Against Rome...” ..., p. 48.

³⁸ C. RUZZA, O. SCHMIDTKE: “The Northern League: Changing Friends and Foes, and its Political.” In: *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe*. Eds. D. CESARANI, M. FULBROOK. London—New York 1996, pp. 182—184.

³⁹ H.G. BETZ: “Against Rome...” ..., p. 49.

⁴⁰ I. MONTANELLI, M. CERVİ: *L'Italia di Berlusconi. 1993—1995*. Milan 2001, p. 197—198.

⁴¹ One of the reasons for abandoning the coalition was the unsuccessful politics of the first Berlusconi government (numerous *ad personam* rights from the coalition leader, and prosecution’s investigations affecting his internal allies), which was not appreciated by the LN party as it could tarnish its image. Also, the LN could not count on the introduction of its own reforms.

⁴² D. WOODS: “A critical analysis of the Northern League’s ideographical profiling.” In: *Journal of Political Ideologies* 2010, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 191. DOI: 10.1080/13569310903512282.

started to search for other forms of mobilisation. From the beginning of the *la Padania* newspaper (1997), the attacks have been directed, *usque ad nauseam*, at immigrants. A special column, entitled “ghosts of terrorism,” was created. For propaganda purposes, it exploited the memory of the Italian terrorist attacks in the 1970s.⁴³ According to David Art, the anti-immigration element became more prominent after 1998, when the Lega established international connections with the Vlaams Blok (VB), the Front National (FN) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), and took a stance typical of the radical right, such as: anti-immigration, Islamophobia, homophobia, and opposition to the EU. The slogans voiced by the LN became more aggressive. The LN Mayor of Treviso suggested that the immigrants be dressed as rabbits and shot with a rifle,⁴⁴ and a councillor from the same city, Giorgio Bettio from the LN (2007), expressed that the SS practice should be followed — ten immigrants should be punished for offending one of the native citizens.⁴⁵ It must be remembered that the Lega Nord excludes “strangers” on the basis of ethnic origins, and not “genetics.”⁴⁶ According to Damian Tambini, the criteria of purity allow for a separation between “the external”, which should be eliminated, and “the internal.” Due to its nationalistic attitude, the league was placed in a certain area of legitimisation: if it does not fight for sovereignty, it fights for the rights of a group, based on the cultural specificity.⁴⁷ After a short affair with the left, in the period of detachment from the Berlusconi government,⁴⁸ between 1996 and 2001 the LN attacked mostly the ruling left-wing parties, perceived as being too “soft” and inefficient and thus allowing the settlement of terrorist bases due to weak immigration controls; in 2004, the party accused the European Commission in the same manner.⁴⁹ In 1999, the party becomes divided: Bossi expels higher ranking members and the party leader in the Piedmont region, Domenico

⁴³ L. DI MATTEO: “Des bombes comme des bonbons. Le leader de la Ligue du Nord et les années de plomb.” In: *Lignes* 2003, Vol.1, No. 10, DOI : 10.3917/lignes1.010.0134.

⁴⁴ D. ART: *Inside the Radical Right*. New York 2011, see: ch. 6.6.

⁴⁵ Ibidem. See also: P. PULLELLA: “Italy politician urges Nazi policies for immigrants.” *Reuters* 2007 [available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-immigration-idUSL0563062920071205> (accessed: 1.01.2016)].

⁴⁶ See the interview by Paolo Vigna and Cesare Panizza with anthropologist Marco AIME: “Verdi tribù del Nord. Intervista a Marco Aime sul razzismo leghista.” *Quaderno di storia contemporanea* 2012, No 52, p. 142.

⁴⁷ D. TAMBINI: *Nationalism in Italian Politics, the stories of the Northern League, 1980—2000*. London—New York 2001, pp. 18—19.

⁴⁸ In the period of detachment from the 1st Berlusconi government (September — December 1994). A. SIGNORE, A. TROCINO: *Razza padana*. Milan 2008, see chapter “Lo show down.”

⁴⁹ C. RUZZA, S. FELLA: *Re-inventing the Italian Right, Territorial politics, populism and ‘post-fascism’*. London—New York 2009, pp. 95—96.

Comino, who declared his willingness to join Berlusconi.⁵⁰ The LN also opposes Turkey's accession to the European Union, which is clearly expressed in its visual propaganda (2003—2004).⁵¹ In the scope of immigration, the party quickly reaches an agreement with the Forza Italia, whose record expensive campaign of 2001 was focused on law and order and security issues. A great role in reporting on the immigration problem was played by the media — thanks to them this issue gradually came back to attention. According to Mario Morcellini, the Italian media (television and newspapers — the research covers the period of 1989—2009) present the immigrants in terms of “security” (76.2% of the immigrants are the perpetrators or the victims of crimes), and the immigrants' presence is depicted as a problem that needs to be solved. The immigrant's image is composed mostly of the criminal factor; in 80% of the cases the immigrant is male, while his motives depend on his country of origin.⁵² The transformation of the Lega Nord was observed by Ignazi in 2005. In the researcher's opinion, it stems from the regionalism of the protest party, supporting the anti-immigration and authoritarian politics, and resembling other extremist parties in Europe.⁵³ When it comes to the Church — before 2001 it was perceived as an emanation of the corrupt DC party, and thus untrustworthy.⁵⁴ After 2001, it became essential for saving family values and the Italian identity in the battle with the Islamic fundamentalism, and therefore, the party is keen to identify itself with the Church.⁵⁵ An original characteristic, in comparison with other Italian parties, is the paranoid belief in international conspiracy (powers that may threaten the productivity of the northern region, and exacerbate the immigration at the same time), owing to which the relations with capitalism, globalisation, the European Union and the Church are at least ambivalent. The Catholic Church — shut away in its palace of greed — has lost all of its credibility and is trying to fill its seminaries with religious people from the Third World, whereas capitalism is thriving thanks to immigration resulting

⁵⁰ B. GIORDANO: “The contrasting geographies of ‘Padania’: The case of the Lega Nord in Northern Italy.” *Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers)* 2001, Vol. 33, No 1, p. 36. DOI: 10.1111/1475-4762.00005.

⁵¹ D. WOODS: *A Critical Analysis of the Northern...*, p. 200.

⁵² Research conducted under the direction of Professor Mario Morcellini. M. MORCELLINI: *Ricerca nazionale su immigrazione e asilo nei media italiani*. Rome 2009, pp. 1—2 [available at: https://www.unhcr.it/sites/53a161110b80eeaac7000002/assets/53a165f50b80eeaac70003e0/7sintesi_ricerca_immigrazione_e_asilo_sui_media__sapienza_v3.0.pdf (accessed: 4.02.2016)].

⁵³ P. IGNAZI: “Legitimation and Evolution on the Italian Right Wing: Social and Ideological Repositioning of Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord.” *South European Society & Politics* 2005, Vol. 10, No 2, p. 333.

⁵⁴ L. BONFRESCHI: “Il fenomeno leghista e la Lega Nord...”, see chapter 8.4.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

in the citizens paying the highest price — the cost of its development.⁵⁶ The 2001 results were disappointing: the LN did not cross the electoral threshold of 4% in the Lower House. It was clear that the LN would not become an alternative to the right wing, which in 2001 would have been able to function in the government even without it.⁵⁷ Within the government, in November 2005 the LN actively sought to pass a devolution law, voted against by all parties — thus the law was subjected to a referendum.⁵⁸ The party lost many of its supporters, as it had to acknowledge the central authority in Rome and abandon its secessionism. Therefore, it decided to go back to federalism, and in 2006 it renewed its cooperation with Berlusconi.⁵⁹ The elections of 2006 were unsatisfactory to Bossi (from 3.9% in 2001 to 4.6%), as he informed the *Corriere della Sera*.⁶⁰ Being in opposition (2006—2008), the Lega Nord again radicalised its policy, which became anti-Turkish and anti-Chinese.⁶¹ The 2008 elections brought a high percentage of votes (a result similar to that of 1992, the party gained 8.3%), but the LN was not yet developed in the red regions, contrary to the Popolo della Libertà (PdL) party, which did not escape the attention of Caciagli, who spoke about replacing the red colour with „three colours.”⁶² Also, the party’s network of support based on small companies started to crumble due to the economic crisis.⁶³ The conquest of the red belt was observable only at the time of European elections (2009), when the party progressed even in the southern district, and of the regional elections of 2010 — spectacular for the party.⁶⁴ Its expansion in the red territories casts doubts on the model of interpretation, which combines the phe-

⁵⁶ C. RUZZA, S. FELLA: *Re-inventing the Italian Right...*, p. 96.

⁵⁷ D. ALBERTAZZI, D. McDONNELL: *Populists in Power*. New York 2015, pp. 8—82.

⁵⁸ The referendum on the amendment of the constitution was a failure (61.3% against, 38.7% for).

⁵⁹ J. CARVALHO: *Impact of Extreme Right Parties on Immigration Policy: Comparing Britain, France and Italy*. New York, p. 143.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ The LN wanted to introduce high customs duties on Chinese products. M. TARCHI: *L'Italia populista...*, p. 267.

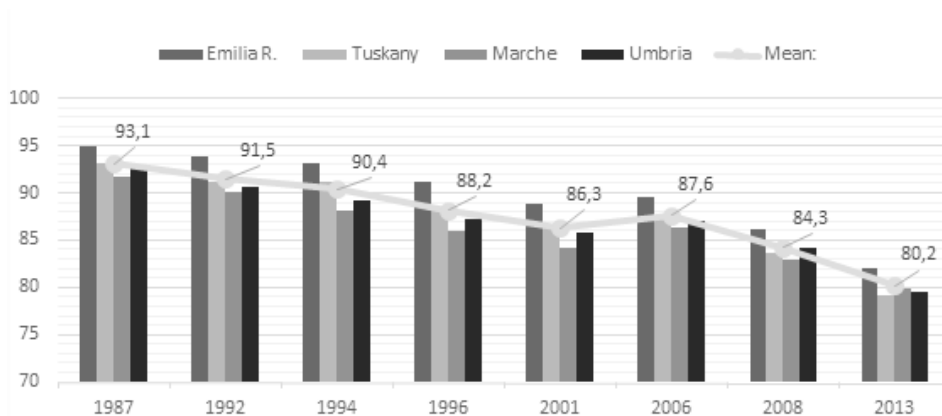
⁶² M. CACIAGLI: “Le regioni rosse nell’Europa continentale. Un’epopea del Novecento.” *Cambio* 2014, Anno IV, No. 8, p. 43. DOI: 10.1400/228740.

⁶³ N. PORCELLATO, S. ROMBI: *Uno sguardo dentro la Lega Nord: caratteristiche e preferenze degli iscritti al più longevo partito italiano. XXVIII SISP Conference, Perugia 2014*, p. 5 [available at: <http://www.candidateandleaderselection.eu/sites/default/files/files/natascia-porcellatostefano-rombi-1834.pdf> (accessed: 17.12.2015)].

⁶⁴ In the 2010 regional elections: in Emilia-Romagna the party won 13.7%, in Tuscany — 6.5%, in Marche — 6.3% and in Umbria — 4.3%; in the same regions, in the elections to the European Parliament, the party won 11.1%, 4.3%, 5.5% and 3.6%, respectively. Source: Ministero dell’Interno, *Archivio storico* [available at: <http://elezionistorico.interno.it>. (accessed: 11.03.2016)].

nomenon of popularity of the Lega Nord with a mutation of the Democrazia Cristiana culture. One of the reasons for a greater competition in the red regions may be a weaker support in the areas with the

Table I — Voter turnout (%) in the red belt of Italy (general elections: 1987—2013)



Source: The author's own elaboration, based on the data from: P. CORBETTA, M.S. PIRETTI: *Atlante storico elettorale d'Italia*. pp. 164—200, and Ministero Dell'Interno, *Archivio storico* [available at: <http://elezionistorico.interno.it>. (accessed: 11.03.2016)].

historically highest turnout, and where going to the polls is a form of tradition (see table I, above). This phenomenon may be an indicator of dissatisfaction,⁶⁵ which brings serious consequences for regions with a long communist tradition. If the ties between the electorate and the party become weak, external forces may intervene. The growth of the LN's support stopped with the scandals surrounding Bossi. A significant obstacle was also the appearance of the new Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) party of Beppe Grillo that won in the North, in more industrialised areas (in 2012 the Lega Nord won in agrarian areas or those with a low population density).⁶⁶ Bossi's replacement by Roberto Maroni did not help much.⁶⁷ After numerous failures of the party, in Decem-

⁶⁵ J.L. NEWELL: *Parties and Democracy in Italy*. Burlington 2000, pp. 19—20. The phenomenon of a poor electoral turnout is even more visible in regional and European elections, although generally, a fall in the turnout is always visible in the case of parliamentary elections.

⁶⁶ See: P. COLLOCA, F. MARANGONI: "Lo shock elettorale." In: *Il partito di Grillo*. Eds. P. CORBETTA, E. GUALMINI. Bologna 2013, pp. 76—77; G. SANTORO: *Un Grillo Qualunque. Il Movimento 5 Stelle e il Populismo Digitale nella Crisi dei Partiti Italiani*. Rome 2012, pp. 142—143.

⁶⁷ The 2012 administration elections and the 2013 parliamentary elections (4.1% in the Lower House) were disastrous for the party.

ber 2013, Matteo Salvini became its secretary and restored the expansion in the red regions.⁶⁸ In political surveys conducted to evaluate the Italians' trust in their political leaders (20.11.2015—22.04.2016), Salvini held the 3rd position, defeating Beppe Grillo and coming closer to Matteo Renzi⁶⁹ in the second place. This means that he is the first leader of the centre and right-wing coalition, thus defeating Silvio Berlusconi. "I am the leader [...] Berlusconi knows how to read the numbers," Salvini said.⁷⁰

Various phases of ideological metamorphosis

Like the warrior Guelph Alberto, Bossi fights, protecting the oppressed and productive North against the exploitative South and the central authority in Rome. His enemy may be anyone who would threaten a social group. The best summing-up may be found in the words of Gianfranco Miglio, spoken during the electoral campaign in a meeting of the federalist congress in Bologna in 1994:

[t]he level of civickness depends on the method of limitation of the number and presence of parasites [...]. If the parasites become more numerous, the animal dies, and thus, the society dies. [...] The parasite is the one who does not produce wealth, but lives, consuming the wealth produced by others. [...] Centralism and parasitism are closely related phenomena. [...] The country which we have been called to change is a country infected by an army of fleas. [...].⁷¹

⁶⁸ In the 2014—2015 regional elections, the party won 19.4% of the votes in Emilia Romagna, 16.2% in Tuscany, 14.0% in Umbria, 13.0% in the Marche region. Source: la Repubblica — l'Espresso, *Elezioni regionali*: [http://www.repubblica.it/static/speciale/2014/elezioni/regionali/emilia_romagna.html] (accessed: 1.05.2016); <http://www.repubblica.it/static/speciale/2015/elezioni/regionali/toscana.html> (accessed: 1.05.2016); <http://www.repubblica.it/static/speciale/2015/elezioni/regionali/marche.html> (accessed: 1.05.2016); <http://www.repubblica.it/static/speciale/2015/elezioni/regionali/umbria.html> (accessed: 1.05.2016)].

⁶⁹ Research conducted by the Ixe' Institute for Agorà-RAI 3 [available at: <http://www.istitutoixe.it>] (accessed: 10.05.2016)].

⁷⁰ "Rightwing Northern League makes gains in Italian elections." *The Guardian* [available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/01/northern-league-gains-italian-elections-matteo-salvini>] (accessed: 9.05.2016)].

⁷¹ The video is available on the Lega Nord blog: [<http://leganordcollegno.blogspot.com/2012/10/lintervento-del-professor-miglio-al.html>] (accessed: 18.12.2015)].

One of the basic elements of the LN rhetoric is the protection of the economic and cultural interests of the North. Betz has noted that the choice of the electoral strategy depends on the social groups which the party intends to attract.⁷² In 1998, he wrote that a group of blue collars and small entrepreneurs and tradesmen from the northern peripheries had ensured the success and revival of the Lega Nord in 1996.⁷³ It is possible to identify four periods of the development of the protection of interests of this social group, for which the Lega Nord has proposed four solutions. The first one is the (A) ethnocentric and nationalist approach. Together with other leagues, the Lega Autonomista Lombarda created new ethnic groups, with no historical or anthropological references, using a common dialect (or the national language), and protecting the humiliated entities against the centralising elites of Piedmont, which allowed for a revision of the history (unification, Fascism, the First Republic), and its presentation in the light of a battle for independence of the suppressed ethnic groups with a potential to become nations.⁷⁴ It is interesting that a discourse leading to a conflict around culture and language resembles the strategy of Antonio Gramsci. The Marxists used mainly the arguments of economy and violence, whereas this Italian writer claimed that the most effective struggle with the bourgeoisie was the creation of a culture (including a language) within the working class.⁷⁵ The Lega Veneta and its leader, Franco Rocchetta, maintained the ethnocentric and nationalist discourse, while the Lega Lombarda understood that once it had won the electorate in its own region, it needed to get rid of its limitations.⁷⁶ Ethnocentrism could not coexist with nationalism, as according to Gellner's thesis a nation must exist for nationalism to occur, and the structure of the nation in the North was too artificial and arbitrary. Therefore, Bossi's party elaborated on the rhetoric concerning "freedom from the shackles of Rome, mother of all evil."⁷⁷ Instead of focusing on fiction, the party focuses on real issues, such as the North-South economic problem.⁷⁸ "Ethno-nationalism" remains dormant in the party's ideology.⁷⁹ Another approach, (B) of federalist (connected with devolution) and autonomistic nature, distinguishes the Lega Lombarda (1986—1991) and the Lega Nord from other similar parties. It is a proposal of creation of a federal Italian State, in opposition to the central authority in Rome, comprising 9 states with shared socio-economic rather

⁷² H.G. BETZ: *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York 1994, p. 142.

⁷³ H.G. BETZ: "Against Rome"..., p. 52.

⁷⁴ W. BRIERLEY, L. GIACOMETTI: "Italian National Identity...", pp. 170—171.

⁷⁵ See further A. GRAMSCI: *Quaderni del carcere*. Turin 1975.

⁷⁶ BRIERLEY, L. GIACOMETTI: "Italian National Identity...", p. 171.

⁷⁷ C. CHAMPEYRACHE: *La Ligue du Nord, Un séparatisme...*, p. 93.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

than ethnic characteristics.⁸⁰ The most important fact is that Bossi's party uses ethnocentric and xenophobic sentiments, but these refer more often to socio-economic elements than to ethnic and cultural ones.⁸¹ Between 1990 and 1992, the Lega Nord established the Sindacato Autonomista Lombardo association. Its task was to "eliminate the unification of salaries, protect the native workforce against the flood of immigrants, fight against monopolies, and protect small enterprises and tradesmen against them."⁸² From time to time, Bossi uses a threat of creation of a separate country, but in the end, he stays with the federalist line.⁸³ According to Betz, in the early phase, the fairly primitive programme of the Lega Nord reflected the North's bitterness about being exploited economically by other regions of the country owing to an arrangement favouring particracy and the central State with the capital in Rome (initially the guilty parties were the centralisers of Piedmont), without which — in the words of Vimercanti and Bossi — the North would have been "the wealthiest country in Europe, and possibly in the world."⁸⁴ Next, the party adopted (C) separatist positions; at that time, it abandoned its federalist approach in favour of secession of a separate place called Padania composed of the North and the central region.⁸⁵ It is particularly emphasised in the period of departure from the centre-right coalition.⁸⁶ Bossi also abandoned any claim to representing a neoliberal approach to economic policy.⁸⁷ The party's support gradually became weaker in the light of individual electoral results.⁸⁸ Emanuele Massetti dates the active and unconcealed secessionism of the party at 1996—1999; before that period, the party had been focused on devolution.⁸⁹ Although it tried to use the non-existent ethnic divisions and politicise the cultural and linguistic identities, its main "driving force"

⁸⁰ H.G. BETZ: "Against Rome"..., p. 48.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 49.

⁸² E. BONERANDI: "Un sindacato per Bossi. »È ora che il nord abbia salari più alti«." *La Repubblica* 1990 [available at: http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1990/06/01/un-sindacato-per-bossi-ora-che.html?refresh_ce (accessed: 5.10.2015)].

⁸³ H.G. BETZ: "Against Rome"..., p. 49.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 48, see also: W. BRIERLEY, L. GIACOMETTI: *Italian National Identity*..., p. 171.

⁸⁵ B. GIORDANO: "A Place Called Padania? The Lega Nord and the Political Representation of Northern Italy." In: *European Urban and Regional Studies*. 1999, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 215.

⁸⁶ M. HUYSEUNE: *Modernity and Secession: The Social Sciences and the Political Discourse of the Lega Nord in Italy*. London—New York 2006, p. 11.

⁸⁷ J.A. AGNEW, M.E. SHIN: *Berlusconi's Italy. Mapping Contemporary Italian Politics*. Philadelphia 2008, p. 86.

⁸⁸ M. HUYSEUNE: *Modernity and Secession*..., p. 11.

⁸⁹ E. MASSETTI: "Explaining Regionalist Party Positioning in a Multidimensional Ideological Space: A Framework for Analysis." *Regional & Federal Studies* 2009, Vol. 19, No 4—5, p. 509, DOI: 10.1080/13597560903310246.

were issues connected with economics.⁹⁰ The LN returned to more moderate demands, striving to protect the interests of the North by implementing a new form of federalism. The last analysed approach (D) is associated with fiscal federalism (1999—2013), within the ideology of the Lega Nord understood as the regions' right to keep their entire fiscal revenue. According to Shin and Agnew, the party became obsessed with this form of federalism, where the local authorities would make independent decisions on increases and expenses.⁹¹ The takeover of the secretary's position by Salvini is a return to anti-particracy and anti-consociationalism⁹² (strong criticism of the government and the party of Matteo Renzi). Another enemy is the European Union (Germany is particularly dangerous, as it appropriates the entire wealth⁹³), the euro currency,⁹⁴ and judges.⁹⁵ The LN resembles the old protest party, but this time the enemy is not the South or the central region, as both are equal victims of the system (wrong public spending, globalisation, the European Union), similarly to the North.⁹⁶ When it comes to the last transformations of the Lega Nord, it is necessary to present the relations between populism and the European Union. According to Jack Hayward, populism is a response to the shortcomings of democratic elitism: the political elite, and in this case the European Union, has lost the role of mediator — the populists see it as not acting in the public interest and being corrupt, and therefore, it should be replaced by other groups, such as the populists.⁹⁷ This element seems to link the heterogeneous foreign parties (as the Lega Nord and other

⁹⁰ M. HUYSEUNE: *Contemporary Centrifugal Regionalism: Comparing Flanders and Northern Italy*, pp. 1—5 [available at: poli.vub.ac.be/publi/online/alles-michel.pdf. (accessed: 2.03.2015)].

⁹¹ J.A. AGNEW, M.E. SHIN: "Spatial Regression for Electoral Studies: The Case of the Italian Lega Nord." In: *Revitalizing Electoral Geography*. Eds. B. WARF, J. LEIB. Farnham 2011, p. 59.

⁹² M. TARCHI: *L'Italia populista...*, p. 270.

⁹³ F. MERLO: "Secessione addio, difendiamo i confini." La carica della Lega di Salvini l'identitario. *La Repubblica*. 2014 [available at: http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/11/01/news/secessione_addio_difendiamo_i_confini_la_carica_della_lega_di_salvini_lidentitario-99490205/ (accessed: 4.04.2016)].

⁹⁴ Salvini calls the euro a "criminal currency." J. MACKENZIE: "Italy's Northern League calls for EU to be 'demolished'." *Reuters* 2014 [available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-politics-salvini-idUSKBN0JO22G20141210> (accessed: 11.12.2015)].

⁹⁵ C. ZAPPERI: "Salvini dopo Bossi, la battaglia della Lega contro le toghe." *Corriere della Sera* 2016 [available at: http://www.corriere.it/politica/cards/salvini-bossi-battaglia-lega-contro-toghe/gli-insulti-pm-abate_principale.shtml (accessed: 21.04.2016)].

⁹⁶ A. FRANZI, A. MADRON: *Matteo Salvini #ilMilitante. La nuova Lega guarda anche al Sud per cambiare il centrodestra e l'Europa. Contro Renzi, l'euro e l'immigrazione di massa*. Florence 2015, see: ch. 3.

⁹⁷ J. HAYWARD: "The populist challenge to elitist democracy in Europe." In: *Elitism, Populism, and European Politics*. Ed. J. HAYWARD. Oxford 2004, p. 10.

populist parties), and incompatible ideologies; the very aversion to the euro and to the European Union has recently brought together the Lega Nord — Matteo Salvini, and a Fascism-inspired party — the CasaPound Italia (CPI). In their joint demonstrations against the euro, it was possible to see the open-hand salute, and fascist symbols and colours mixed with the green flags of the Lega Nord. In line with the long tradition of the party's opposition to Fascism, Bossi condemns such actions. The LN has joined its forces with extremist parties in Europe, which brings back the words of Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin and Brian Jenkins: Europe is a battlefield, where different forces join each other around shared problems, in order to avoid isolation.⁹⁸ In 2015, when asked about the reason for joining forces with the nationalist CasaPound, Salvini replied:

I hate prejudice; I am curious and always want to understand something. In them, I see authentic people who organised battles over the euro, immigration, and family. It is true: in the Lega Nord, where I grew, fascist posters were attacked. But in 2015, one cannot be defined as a fascist or a communist. I do not care about the right wing or the left wing; we are far from this mentality. We are an opposition outside the parliament, beyond the division into the right and the left [...].⁹⁹

Another common ground connecting the LN with the South and with incompatible parties, such as the CPI and the Fratelli d'Italia-Alleanza Nazionale (FdI-AN), is the protection of the borders against the immigrants. Salvini likes to compare the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean to an invasion, and is a frequent critic of Rome's population.¹⁰⁰ Muslims in Italy are "trying to impose a way of life that is incompatible with ours," he said.¹⁰¹ The Lega Nord uses the same slogans and posters as Marine Le Pen. "Assez de racisme anti-Français! On est chez nous" (Stop the anti-French racism, we are at home) is very similar to the LN's slogan "Padroni a Casa Nostra" (Let us be the masters of our own homes). "Non à l'islamisme" (No to Islam) is very similar to "Stop invasione. Prima la nostra gente!" (Let us stop the invasion. Our people are most important). It seems that Salvini has filled the gap resulting from the political absence of Gianfranco Fini, a supporter of Le Pen and of the national policy.

⁹⁸ A. MAMMONE, E. GODIN, B. JENKINS: "Introduction." In: *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*. Eds. A. MAMMONE, E. GODIN, B. JENKINS. London—New York 2013, pp. 6—7.

⁹⁹ E. GIOVANNINI: *Europa anno zero: Il ritorno dei nazionalismi*. Venice 2015, see chapter: "Faccia a faccia con Matteo Salvini."

¹⁰⁰ "Rightwing Northern League..."

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

Conclusion

According to Tronconi, the Lega Nord region had no conditions under which an ethno-regionalist party could be formed.¹⁰² Also, there are no clear territorial borders in the party's ideology and strategy, as these have been different, in line with the opinions of individual party members, e.g. Miglio and Bossi.¹⁰³ This regionalism was non-typical, protecting the interest of a "half-fictional" ethnic group, not entirely imaginary owing to the presence of the Catholic subculture (strongly connecting the interests of the social group and the party), and linking regionalism and nationalism. Today, the party is not limited territorially: it is gaining more support in the regions of communist subculture. With the current absence of the Alleanza Nazionale party, and Forza Italia¹⁰⁴ being weakened and, according to surveys, becoming the leading right-wing party, it would not be difficult for the LN to develop further in the South (starting from the Lazio region), becoming not a multi-regional,¹⁰⁵ but a state wide party. In the strategy, regionalism is replaced by nationalism. The „North first” motto is replaced by „Italians first”; the anti-Southern welfare chauvinism is replaced by its anti-immigration, mainly anti-Islamic version. The articles of the party's statute also leave a door open for its expansion in new territories (Art. 2 of the statute). Its driving power is a constant battle. We do not know what will happen after the establishment of Padania with a „democratic method” (Art. 2 of the statute). In its attempt at abandoning the division into ideologies, the party is looking for allies among its former enemies, regardless numerous contradictions.

¹⁰² F. TRONCONI: "Ethnic Identity and Party Competition. An Analysis of the Electoral Performance of Ethnoregionalist Parties in Western Europe." *World Political Science Review* 2005, Vol. 2, No 2, p. 147.

¹⁰³ Cf. D. STRUSKA: *Między unitaryzmem a federalizmem. Ewolucja współczesnej myśli i praktyki ustrojowej Włoch*. Warszawa 2008, p. 97; G.A. STELLA: "Oltre la Padania L'onda di piena del Carroccio. La Lega Nord supera i «confini celtici»." *Corriere della Sera* 2009, [available at: http://www.corriere.it/politica/speciali/2009/elezioni/notizie/oltre_la_padania_l_onda_di_piena_del_carroccio_gian_antonio_stella_0592013e-54a9-11de-b645-00144f02aa-bc.shtml?refresh_ce-cp (accessed: 1.01.2016)]. See also: G.A. STELLA: *Dio Po: Gli uomini che fecero la Padania*. Milan 1996 and P. STEFANINI: *Avanti Po. La Lega Nord alla riscossa nelle regioni rosse*. Milan 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Apart from the Left, the main obstacle for the LN widespread support is still M5S. Owing to the rather unfavourable rhetoric about the South, Beppe Grillo's party initially won votes in the northern and central regions of Italy. P. COLLOCA, F. MARANGONI: *Lo shock elettorale...*, p. 77; G. SANTORO: *Un Grillo Qualunque...*, p. 142. Subsequently, the party vote spread more evenly across the country. R. BIORCIO, P. NATALE: *Politica a 5 Stelle. Idee, storia e strategie del movimento di Grillo*. Milan 2013, pp. 58—59.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. M. STRMISKA: "Conceptualization and typology of European regional parties: a note on methodology." *Středoevropské politické studie* 2003 [available at: <http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=167> (accessed: 5.12.2015)].

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